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SUBJECT: MGGZ01: FACTIONS CONDEMN HAMAS ARRESTS, REFUSE TO
CHANGE GOVERNMENT

REF: JERUSALEM 2749

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: A full day after the June 29 arrest of approximately 90 Hamas cabinet ministers, Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) members, and others, Fatah and Hamas continue to condemn the Israeli action. Hamas is reportedly still working out what steps are necessary for the government to function without the eight arrested cabinet ministers. The political storm caused by the arrests have complicated efforts by President Abbas to create a new government. END SUMMARY.

FATAH RESPONDS TO THE ARRESTS

12. (C) Fatah spokespersons continue to condemn the June 29 Israeli arrests of Hamas cabinet ministers and PLC members (reftel). However the head of the Fatah PLC bloc, Azam al-Ahmad, generated controversy when he suggested that President Abbas should use his constitutional powers to resolve the crisis by filling in the vacant Hamas ministerial positions with officials from the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). (NOTE: 8 Hamas Ministers out of a total cabinet of 24, were arrested. Article 81 of the Palestinian Basic Law states that the Government shall be considered to have resigned and shall be re-formed in the case of "any addition, change, vacancy, or removal that involves at least one-third of the Council of Ministers." END NOTE.) Al-Ahmad's remarks were criticized by Hamas as well as other Fatah members who stated that Israel did not have the right to overthrow an elected government. Speaking to ConGen political specialist on June 30, al-Ahmad claimed the media misrepresented his remarks, and that he was not talking about forming a new government.

HAMAS RESPONSE

13. (C) Hamas rejected any suggestion that a new government be formed. The movement issued a statement on June 29 condemning al-Ahmad's reported remarks and saying that any cabinet formed as a result of the Israeli arrests would be "a collaborator government mounted on Israeli tanks." Yousef Rizqa, the Palestinian Authority (PA) Minister of Information, told the press that the PA would take a series of steps to fill the gaps left by the arrested ministers. Fatah sources told ConGen political specialist that these steps would include having senior undersecretaries and directors general close to Hamas fill in for the missing ministers, and having some ministers cover others' portfolios (reftel). The sources stressed, however, that no final decisions have been made yet.

ABU MAZEN'S STEPS

14. (C) Nabil Abu Rudeineh, the President's Media Advisor,

informed ConGen political specialist that President Abbas created an ad hoc crisis management committee to deal with the arrests and Israeli incursion into Gaza. The committee, consisting of Fatah, Hamas, and smaller PLO factions, will serve as a coordination--not decision-making--body. The sources said that the committee would meet on a daily basis for briefings, and would perhaps be consulted if the President had to make any decisions. They denied, however, that Abu Mazen is contemplating the creation of a new cabinet.

COMMENT

15. (C) Even if Abu Mazen wishes to use the current situation to introduce an emergency cabinet, he would be hard pressed to win popular support at this time after the arrests in the West Bank. In the short term, all Palestinian factions have rallied in support of the arrested Hamas officials, in effect making them a sub-group of the larger prisoner issue. While Abu Mazen remains committed to the goal of a PA government that meets Quartet requirements, the current crisis that began with the kidnapping of an IDF soldier and led to the arrests has frozen the Palestinian political scene and made it more difficult for Abu Mazen to effect a change in government.

WALLES